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P.O. Box 570842

Dallas, TX 75357-0842

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Numismatics International Bulletin

Vol. 55

January 2020

Number 1

Table of Contents

Robert Tye

Brexit and Troy Weight (Part 1).....4

Eric Hodge

Rothsay Merchant Countermarks.....9

Our first item discusses how a difference in weight standards came about between offa of Mercia and Charlemagne in the late 780s.

Coins are not the the only objects that were countermarked. Our second article discusses one such on a merchant's token.

After much delay, we can now present you with our auction. Enjoy and happy bidding

As usual, all submissions are welcome.

Joseph Uphoff

Editor

Brexit, and Troy Weight (Part I)

Robert Tye

The hard Brexit of around 790-92 AD is an almost forgotten detail of history. We are told of it in a letter written by Alcuin of York (to an Irish scholar, Colcou) in early 790 AD. He wrote:

But I do not know what is going to become of us, for the devil has been kindling his fire so that some dispute has arisen between King Charles and King Offa, with the result that sea crossings have been forbidden to merchants by both parties and are coming to an end. ¹

Alcuin, biblical scholar, poet and mathematician, was a close advisor to Charlemagne (“King Charles”) so knew what he was talking about, but this enigmatic statement is all we know directly of the event, save from another letter, this time from Charlemagne himself to Offa, of Spring 796 AD. That tells that an agreement had been reached, and thenceforward all persons travelling for trade between England the Continent must pay the due tolls at the due places, but that any recognised merchant operating in this above board manner should expect the reciprocal legal protection of both kings.

However, if we look more closely, at the way this event is nested within other decisions of the period 789 to 796 AD we find a series of steps being taken that would dictate the metrological traditions of Britain and France for the next thousand years. Our story starts in 789 AD with the publication by Charlemagne of his ‘Admonitio generalis’, instructing all citizens to use ‘just and equal weights’ which cites the biblical book of Leviticus thus: 74. To all. That all, both in the dioceses and in the monasteries, are to have equal and correct measures and just and equal weights, whether in giving or receiving, in accordance with the commandment which we find in the Lord’s law [Lev. 19. 35-6] ²

It seems quite likely that this requirement was read literally in the 8th century. If so, it posed quite a problem – for what exactly was the standard of weight commanded - by God, via Moses? The ruler of the Holy Land at that time was the Caliph in Baghdad, and as he maintained one of the most sophisticated courts of the contemporary world, including the great library and institution known as the “House of Wisdom” - it would make perfect sense to enquire there. And the suggestion that Charlemagne did indeed get his weight standards from Caliph Harun al Rashid in Baghdad is a very old one. The metrological mechanics of that tradition have puzzled scholars for centuries (see for instance the unconvincing effort of Saigey in 1834 3). Returning to our 8th century narrative, we next find two surely pertinent and closely co-ordinated coinage reforms. According to the most recent numismatic thought Offa reformed his penny weight in 792/3 AD, Charlemagne a year later in 793/4 AD. 4

It is hard believe the above are four separate events, coinciding by coincidence. Rather it seems to be the rolling out of one single matter, connecting weight standards, tariffs and trade, between 789 and 796 AD.



Reformed Offa penny, after 792/3 AD c. 1.42g, Image courtesy Spink 7

I believe we can piece together an explanation of how these events fitted together by adopting elements from the work of three independent minded 20 th century studies, those of Skinner, Grierson and Connor. 5 None of them give the whole story, but all the needed parts are in there to be pulled out and assembled. Let us start with the crucial account of English standards published by Skinner. This holds that the English weight standards adopted in Offa’s reform must have come from Islam, and that those Islamic standards were themselves rooted in much earlier traditions, going back before 2000 BC. Elements of Skinner’s story were first

published in 1721 by George Hooper, Bishop of Bath and Wells. Hooper held that the English Troy system must have come from Egypt, since even in his own day, both the grains and the ounces were near identical and further, the dirhem was near exactly two Troy pennyweights. This thesis was soon popularised by Arbuthnot in 1727. In 1967, Skinner extended the hypothesis much further, showing that under ‘Abd al-Malik, Islam used not only a bullion dirhem of 64 (wheat) grains but also a coin dirhem of 60 (wheat) grains. The first matches twice the Troy penny of 32 (wheat) grains, the second twice the Sterling penny of 30 (wheat) grains. Thus the English Sterling penny was half the canonical coin dirhem of ‘Abd al Malik, merely by another name. (System details appended).

Grierson and Connor agreed with Skinner that Troy and Sterling (Tower) were a single linked system, but they ignored his conclusion regarding its Islamic origin. 6 I judge the only thing Skinner misunderstood was how and why the Islamic standard



Abbasid dirhem of Haroon al-Rashid
786 - 809 AD, 2.93g

arrived in to England. That is best explained as triggered by the search for the true standard of Leviticus, as explained above. Thus Troy was adopted by Offa on the assumption that it was the standard Moses himself had decreed. Skinner further showed that 16oz Troy (497.7g) is probably a version of the Islamic ratl kabir (c. 498g), which in turn was a good approximation of the mina of Darius (c.500g) which was without doubt a derivative of the very ancient mina of Sumer, of before 2,100 BC (perhaps 504g). All this being so, its hard to avoid the conclusion that Offa’s shot at replicating the standard of Moses was, at the very least, a very creditable effort.

Turning now to Charlemagne, in 1965 Grierson wrote an excellent but neglected analysis of his penny reform of 793-4 AD. He has

Charlemagne adopting a 16 oz, 256 penny pound of c. 437g for goods, including bullion, and a corresponding 15 oz thus 240



Reformed Charlemagne denier after 793/4, c. 1.7g, image courtesy Elsen 8

penny pound of c. 408g for coin. In this case, his bullion penny and his coining penny are the same, 32 French grains. The tariff/ seigniorage on bullion was the same as Offa, but levied on the pound only, rather than, with Offa and the Caliphs, on the pound and the penny/dirhem. Secondly, on Grierson's account, Charlemagne adopted the different but c. 2000 year old Attic mina of 437g, equal to 16 Roman ounces, as his base unit, whilst Offa, on Skinner's account adopted the 3,000 year old Babylonian pound of c. 500g. That is to say, Charlemagne ultimately used a Roman/New Testament rather than an Old Testament precedent (Again see appended table).

To summarise then, the search for the ultimate biblical true weight standard initiated in 789 AD apparently led rather quickly to a clash of both economic and cultural national realities. Both Offa and Charlemagne sought to internally integrate their metrological and fiscal interests, somewhat along the lines already mapped out by the Early Caliphs. They mutually agreed to a charge of 1/16th, about 6%, tariff on imports. However they did not agree on the basic standard to fix their weights to. Offa it seems stuck with the initially intended "Biblical" standard, ultimately the very ancient Sumerian pound of c. 500g, guided by Islamic, Umayyad scholarship. Meanwhile Charlemagne perhaps changed his mind, since instead he took as his base line a pound of 16 Roman ounces, ultimately the Attic Euboean pound, itself more than 2,000 year old even in his day.

Charlemagne's 15 (Roman) ounce pound lasted into the 12th century in Southern France, but around that time a new French pound appeared, in which 16 new ounces equated to exactly 18 of

the old (Roman) ounces, thus fixing it at c. 489g. Perhaps this was done to partly reverse the earlier position, to make a French pound that approximately replicated Troy? Certainly it was the French pound maintained thenceforth, right down to the French revolution. If we work through the sums, since Attic (437g) was $\frac{7}{8}$ of the Babylonian (c. 500g) pound, this revised 16 French oz pound apparently turns out to be, theoretically, $\frac{63}{64}$ of 16 oz Troy.

We do not know why the two courts picked divergent standards. A unique weight preserved in the Crypta Balba museum in Rome however seems to suggest that they certainly did. That will be explained in the second part of this study

Notes

1. Dümmler, Ernst., ed. *Alcuini epistolae* Epistolae iv, Epistolae karolini aevi ii. (Berlin: 1895)
2. A. Boretius, ed. *Capitularia regum Francorum I* , *Legum Sectio II* (Hanover 1883)
3. Saigey, J. F. *Traité de métrologie ancienne et moderne* (Paris 1834)
4. Naismith, Rory, *Money and Power in Anglo-Saxon England: The Southern English Kingdoms, 757–865* , (Cambridge 2012)
5. F. G. Skinner, *Weights and Measures* , HMSO, (London 1967)
6. R. D. Connor, *The Weights and Measures of England* HMSO, (London 1987) Philip Grierson, *Money and Coinage under Charlemagne* , (1965) (Grierson reprinted in *Dark Age Numismatics*. paper XVIII, (London 1979)
7. Grierson preferred to lodge Anglo-Saxon traditions in ancient Germanic practices. Connor assumed an ultimately Roman source for English standards, but used an incorrect account of Roman coin weight.
7. Spink, Auction 18011, 27 Mar 2018, lot 21
- 8 Jean ELSSEN & ses Fils s.a. Auction 138, 8 September 2018, lot 331.

ROTHSAY MERCHANT COUNTERMARKSEric C. Hodge¹ NI #2784

In a recent auction in London² there were included an extensive and interesting range of '*Tokens and Countermarked Merchants' Issues*'. Two of these, lots 377 (Fig. 1) and 378 (Fig. 2), were described as '*obv. countermarked ROTHSA Y COTTON WORKS around 4/6 1820•, no privy punch-mark on rev.*' Both lots were allocated the Manville³ number X92, the X denoting 'Counterfeits and concoctions purporting to be genuine original issues'.⁴ Subsequently DNW attached a 'Saleroom Notice' to these two lots highlighting their dubious nature by indicating the lots were 'Sold as viewed'. This notice was verbally repeated during the sale of the lots by the auctioneer.

For study purposes there are forty-three photographic examples of type 92 (Figs. 3 & 4) and seven of type X92a (including Figs. 1 & 2) (Table 1). To ensure complete accuracy it is worth mentioning here that the type for these seven coins is now designated X92a because there is a third countermark, on two separate host coins, known as type X92b. This type has already been discussed and judged to be a modern fake.⁵



Fig.1

Rothsay Cotton Works 4/6 1820 no reverse dot. Host is French,

Louis XV, écu aux lauriers, 1735 L (Bayonne). Approx. 41mm diam. (Type X92a).



Fig. 2 Rothsay Cotton Works 4/6 1820 no reverse dot. Host is Ferdinand VII, 8 reales, 1820 JJ Mexico City. Approx. 39mm diam. (Type X92a). Figs. 1 & 2 reproduced by kind permission of Dix Noonan Webb Ltd.

Manville describes the Rothsay Mills countermarks as *‘among the most varied and complex in the entire late eighteenth-century to early nineteenth-century series. They include the only cut dollars from Britain, multiple varieties and punches for the same denomination, one denomination punched over another, additional punch-marks, and a hidden privy mark.’*⁶ It is this mention of a hidden privy mark that has prompted this article and led to the X designation of Figs. 1 & 2.

Again quoting from Manville *‘Two versions are known of the countermark reading **ROTHSAY COTTON WORKS.** within a beaded circle around 4/6 1820• within a roped circle. The inner roped circle of the first version is made up of thirty-five inner and eighty-six outer marks, and the division line between 4 and 6 in the denomination points to the right vertical of the letter **H** in the outer inscription. All of the more than thirty recorded specimens with this mark have a small dot inconspicuously punched below or just to the right of the lowest point of the reverse shield, evidently a privy mark as a verification against counterfeit countermarks.’*⁷ Dollars recorded with this countermark are dated between 1778 and 1821.’ and then *‘The rarer second punch has the inner roped circle made up of thirty-eight inner and eighty-eight outer marks and the division line pointing between the letters **H** and **S** in the outer inscription. Dollars of this type lack the reverse punch-mark*

*and are recorded on host coins dated between 1777 and 1812.*⁸ Today the type 92 dollars (those believed genuine with the privy punch-mark on the reverse) (Figs.3 & 4) are still dated between 1778 and 1821. The rarer second punch type X92a, however, are now dated between 1735 and 1820, the two examples in Figs. 1 & 2 being the earliest and latest dates by far. (Table 1).



Fig. 3 Rothsay Cotton Works 4/6 1820 with reverse dot. Obverse host of Ferdinand VII, 8 reales, 1813-18 MZ Durango. Approx. 39mm diam. Private collection. (Type 92).

Fig. 4 Rothsay Cotton Works 4/6 1820 with reverse dot. Reverse host is Ferdinand VII, 8 reales, 1819 JJ Mexico City. Approx. 39mm diam. Private collection. (Type 92).

The reason for this article, triggered by earlier discussions,⁹ is to put forward all the arguments for and against the X designation on the rarer second type (Table 1) and to decide, if the second mark deserves the X annotation, whether it was a contemporary forgery or modern fake.

Table 1. The known examples of type X92a in host date order.

N o.	Host date/coin	First recorded	Where recorded	Orientation of 4/6	Other details
1	1735 - French écu	Sep. 2013 (1960's)	DNW 113	7 o'clock	Fig. 1
2	1777 - 8 reales	2000	Baldwin gift to BM	12 o'clock	Fig. 7 Canceled. False host.
3	1778 - 8 reales	Jan. 1971	DW Grey	6 o'clock	
4	1808 - 8 reales	Mar. 1963	Spink Num. Circular	3 o'clock	
5	1810 - 8 reales	Apr. 1981	Glen dining	12 o'clock	False host
6	1812 - 8 reales	May 1968	Spink Num. Circular	12 o'clock	
7	1820 - 8 reales	Sep. 2013 (1960's)	DNW 113	12 o'clock	Fig. 2

In Table 1, numbers 1 and 7 were owned by the vendor for many years, but we have no record of when they were acquired. However many of the countermarks in the auction are shown as '*bt L. Sverdloff*' (Leonard Sverdloff) who was a London dealer who died on 4th July 1966.¹¹ This time frame appears to be when most of the coins in the collection were obtained, so it is not unreasonable to place these two lots as being first recorded in the

1960's. Number 2 was presented by A.H. Baldwin & Sons to the British Museum in 2000,¹² but we have no record of when the coin came into the possession of Baldwin.

The writer has been involved in discussions with other interested and knowledgeable researchers and collectors of this series. The most important question, in the writer's opinion, put forward was *what was the incentive for someone to make contemporary counterfeits?* Presumably the simple answer to this is to make a quick profit. If that is accepted, then to make contemporary counterfeits on good silver Spanish-American 8 reales (which is what four examples of X92a are believed to be) these would have to be purchased at well below 4/6 a host coin so that after factoring in costs of making a die, countermarking the host 4/6 and then distributing the coins, a small profit remained. To be worthwhile these counterfeits would have to be made in considerable numbers and not be detected as false by the legitimate issuer. With this countermark we do have information seldom seen, a date included in the countermark lettering, in this case 1820. (Fig. 3). It is, therefore, reasonably assumed that the issue was commenced in 1820 and, commensurate with the latest dated host, continued into at least 1821. Manville provides the market price of Spanish dollars as can be seen from Table 2.¹³

Table 2. The market price of Spanish Dollars between 4 January 1820 and 4 June 1822 and the %age mark-up to the issue value of 4/6.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Price per coin</i>	<i>% mark-up to 4/6</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Price per coin</i>	<i>% mark-up to 4/6</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Price per coin</i>	<i>% mark-up to 4/6</i>
1820			1821			1822		
4 Jan.	4s. 3½d.	4.85	2 Jan	4s. 2¾d.	6.40	1 Jan.	4s. 1½d.	9.09
4 Apr.	4s. 2¾d.	6.40	6 Mar.	4s. 2¾d.	7.46	5 Feb.	4s. 1½d.	9.09
2 Jun.	4s. 2¾d.	7.46	3 Apr.	4s. 1¾d.	8.54	5 Mar.	4s. 1½d.	9.09
1 Sep.	4s. 3d.	5.88	4 Sep.	4s. 1¾d.	8.54	7 May	4s. 1½d.	9.09
1 Dec.	4s. 2¾d.	7.46	6 Nov.	4s. 1½d.	9.09	4 Jun.	4s. 1½d.	9.09

From Table 2 it can be noted that the price of silver was gradually falling through 1820 to 1822. The lower the price of silver, the higher the mark-up for the counterfeiter. Even in 1820 the return appears reasonable enough to attract the unscrupulous, with returns improving. Did these returns in fact attract counterfeiters? Manville reports that the Rothsay tokens could only be spent at the company shop.¹⁴ If this was so, then the detection of false countermarks would be much easier and any attempt at counterfeiting would have to be expertly and accurately carried out. Even if the tokens could be spent in the local environment, the situation of Rothsay on the Isle of Bute meant that the community was close; therefore communications with the Cotton Works would be relatively easy, were questions raised over doubtful countermarks.

The type X92a countermark examples that we have for study (Table 1) show a close proximity to the supposed genuine type 92. What is immediately obvious, however, is the orientation of the type X92a marks. In the forty-three examples of type 92 studied, thirty-six had the top of the line between the 4 and the 6 in 4/6 pointing to the 12 o'clock position on the host coin, three to 2 o'clock, three to 11 o'clock and only one outside this quadrant to 3

o'clock. The type X92a has four pointing to 12 o'clock and one each to 3, 6 and 7 o'clock. This discrepancy raises fundamental questions of control. For two of the type X92a countermarks to be inverted, whereas none of the type 92 has this orientation, would indicate either a lackadaisical attitude to the issue or an effort to make the type more interesting to the collector. If the former then a contemporary issue would be more likely, if the latter a more modern issue.

Of the type 92 and X92a hosts only one is on a non 8 reales, an unusual occurrence in itself¹⁵ (Fig. 1). This interesting fact is supported by the cut countermarked pieces from Rothsay. There are twenty-one photographic examples of half cut tokens (Fig. 5) and twenty-nine of the third cut tokens (Fig. 6), everyone being from an 8 reales.



Fig. 5 2/6 in oval, on obverse host of Charles III, cut half 8 reales. Approx. 39mm diam. Private collection.

Fig. 6 1/8, on obverse host of Charles III, cut third 8 reales. Approx. 39mm diam. Private collection.

So perhaps the French écu was countermarked as a lure for modern collectors, or as appears to have been the case with other issues,¹⁶ the French coin was countermarked at the instigation of a French visitor for a keepsake as it is only slightly worn considering it was eighty-five years old at the time of countermarking. The use of a French host coin, if not done for a visitor, would indicate modern as *the countermark on this is not only upside down ... but the coin itself has a silver content weight of .8695oz, whereas most 8-reales*

contain .7859oz, a difference of over 10%. This weight difference would obviously eat into any profits the contemporary counterfeiter was likely to make.

There is one more very important factor to bear in mind when deciding if the X92a type issue was contemporary or modern. There is a cancelled example of type X92a (Fig. 7) (2 in Table 1). We can be sure this is a type X92a because there are twelve marks on the inner ring between the letters O and Y of Rothsay and there is no dot on the reverse. There are eleven equivalent marks on the type 92. However, it must also be borne in mind that this countermark and cancellation is on a false 8 reales. Is the cancellation due to a false countermark, a false host, or perhaps perpetrated as an added attraction to the modern collector?

The next important question that was raised in our discussions was *why does the type 92 have a privy mark dot? inconspicuously placed on the host reverse?*



Fig. 7 Rothsay Cotton Works 4/6 1820 no reverse dot, cancelled. Host is a false Charles III, 8 reales, 1777 FM Mexico City. Approx. 39mm diam. © The Trustees of the British Museum, ref. 2001-3-17-02. (Type X92a).

It is possible that both type 92 and type X92a are genuine, and the cancelled dollar (Fig. 7) was because it was a false dollar and not a

false countermark. If this was the case then it is reasonable to assume that the type 92 was the second issue because it has the privy mark on the reverse. Why would Rothsay Cotton Works want a second issue? As the issue period, believed to be 1820 to 1821/2, was so short it must be presumed that the first issue was being counterfeited (hence the privy mark on the second issue). If this was the case the question raised was *why would there be two genuine countermarks with the same date of 1820 on the countermark?* It is not believable that the Cotton Works would issue a second type, because of counterfeiting, and make that new type so similar to the first counterfeited type, even with the added privy mark. It appears more likely that one of the issues is a counterfeit and it is unlikely to be the issue with the privy mark. We can assume that the type X92a is a counterfeit.

As 1820 was relatively late in the countermarking period it is possible that, from experience, the Cotton Works decided to set up an internal control from day one by applying a privy mark. If this was the case then type X92a is a copy of type 92, either contemporary or modern.

It was commented that *if Rothsay started off without a privy mark and then noted some counterfeits they would have had to retroactively apply the privy mark to the genuine coins as they cycled to and from the pay office. As they all 'should have been' on genuine 8 reales coins it would be a challenge to 'get it right all the time'. In other words it would be surprising, considering the number of survivors that we have, not seeing even one genuine countermark without a privy mark and even one example of X92a with a privy mark.* So to repeat the conclusion from above, it seems more reasonable that the privy mark was on the type 92 from the start of the issue and that X92a was a very close copy of this type but missing the privy mark.

Summary.

If type X92a is a counterfeit, is it contemporary (forgery) or modern (fake) (i.e. issued after the countermarking period came to an end, specifically for collectors)?

- 1) There is no obvious reason Rothsay Cotton Works should use two such similar countermark punches in a two year period.
- 2) The use of genuine dollars indicates a modern issue as does the use of a more valuable French host, as both would restrict the profit element to a contemporary counterfeiter.
- 3) If we study Table 1 it is apparent that all the seven examples were first reported in the years of the 1960's to 1980's other than number 2 (Fig 7) where we have no reliable information, other than it was presented to the British Museum in 2000. The orientation of the countermarks, if contemporary would indicate lack of control over the issue, (unusual for the Rothsay Cotton Works with much countermarking experience) but as modern could attract collectors.
- 4) The cancelled countermark (Fig. 7) is a conundrum. Having decided that the countermark is counterfeit then it is more likely the cancellation is applied not because the host is false but because the countermark is false. It is also very unusual for a contemporary cancellation to leave not only the value still legible but also the part of the legend that indicates the issuer. The fact that the coin was presented to the British Museum would indicate that the experts at A.H. Baldwin & Sons considered the coin and countermark to be false. There are no available records to confirm this assumption. The balance of probability is that the cancellation is modern and done for the collector market. This is certainly a highly considered action and one that puts the counterfeiter amongst the most insidious

perpetrators of this ‘art’.

- 5) The countermark lettering and the number of marks in the outer and inner rings, being, very close to the original and appearing to use old type lettering punches, could be a contemporary or modern counterfeit.

Conclusion.

With Rothsay being a close community on the Isle of Bute, and with the Cotton Works being experienced in controlling their countermarked issues (hence the privy mark on type 92) it would be probable that a contemporary counterfeit issue would have been extremely difficult to distribute. To make any worthwhile profit, large numbers of coins would need to be circulated to make the forger’s enterprise worthwhile and this is unlikely to have been possible. It is much more probable that profit and ‘kudos’ would be the motivator of a modern counterfeiter.

On balance, and with a fairly high degree of certainty, type X92a can be classified a modern fake.

Notes

1. I have received invaluable help and advice from Michael Dickinson, Ken Eckardt and Mike Shaw in the preparation of this article. The conclusions are mine but the above are all in agreement with them.
2. DNW 113, Tuesday 17 September 2013, sale of the collection of Arthur Chesser (1900-70).
3. Manville, Harrington E., 2001. Tokens of the Industrial Revolution – foreign silver coins countermarked for use in Great Britain, c.1787-1828. London. British Numismatic Society Special Publication No. 3, Spink, London, 2001. (Manville 2001).
4. Manville 2001, xiv.
5. Hodge, Eric C., 2012. A Poor Host leaves a bad Impression. *BNJ* 82, 186-7, 190.
6. Manville 2001, 176.

7. Hodge, Eric C., 2009. Secret Marks on Merchant Countermarked Silver Coins. *BNJ* 79, 245.
8. Manville 2001, 177-8.
9. Manville H.E., 2002. Countermarked Tokens of the Industrial Revolution. *BNJ* 72, 147. Hodge 2009, 245.
10. Manville 2001, 182. There are Countermarked Tokens of the Industrial Revolution. *BNJ* 72, 147. Hodge 2009, 245.((referring to row 4 in Table 1 Ed.)
- 11 DNW 113, introduction with life of Arthur Chesser (1900-1970).
12. Manville 2001, 182.
13. Manville 2001, 245.
14. Manville 2001, 174.
15. Hodge 2012.
16. Hodge 2012, 180-181.